

VILLAGE VOICE
24 MAY 1976

NAT HENTOFF

Sing No Sad Songs for the FBI

Some years ago, I wrote here that Franklin D. Roosevelt had instructed a most willing J. Edgar Hoover to spy on political opponents and other "persons of interest" by any means necessary, including wiretaps. At the time, a prominent historian, who has written extensively on Roosevelt, contacted me. He had never seen any such scurrilous information in the course of his research, and he implied that I was at best gullible and, in any case, irresponsible. My indirect source at the time had been William C. Sullivan, a long-time, very high-level FBI apparatchik (for 10 years director of the domestic intelligence division).

William Sullivan has since surfaced, and parts of the memorandum I saw then are included in Book II of the Church Committee Report, "Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans." You ought to get that report (No. 94-755) from the U.S. Government Printing Office because no newspaper or magazine summary can match the incremental impact of hundreds of pages detailing the zealously routine lawlessness of the FBI and other intelligence agencies over many years and many smashed lives. (Were I teaching in a secondary school, I would build a course on just those green volumes. After reading this set of government terror tales, no kid is ever likely to undervalue the First and Fourth Amendments).

William Sullivan, moreover, if his health permits, might himself do some talking at schools. Friends tell me that Sullivan feels the need for redemptive autumnal work after so long a career as a nigger of the Constitution. If reconstructed junkies and alcoholics can tour the schools, why not a man who has said: "Never once did I hear anybody, including myself, raise the question: 'Is this course of action . . . lawful, is it legal, is it ethical or moral?' We never gave any thought to this line of reasoning, because we were just naturally pragmatic. The one thing we were concerned about was: Will this action work, will it get us what we want?"

Just in terms of that statement

alone, I can see a most valuable educational program—perhaps televised in seminars with kids—involving not only Sullivan but also such other natural pragmatists as Henry Kissinger, the members of this state's Emergency Financial Control Board, Robert McNamara, and, of course, President Carter.

But back to the FBI. I've known a number of agents and supervisors through the years, some of them at conferences and some of them through their unbidden visits to my office. I recognized them all in Sullivan's description. In my experience, they are in no way consciously lawless. They do believe in higher laws than statutes and the Constitution, and in this respect they are quite similar to a self-intoxicated religious order. As avatars of National Security (their Nicene Creed), they can do no wrong in the service of their faith. I mean that literally. They do not believe they can do any wrong, and there is genuine shock among FBI personnel throughout the country that they are now being criticized for such crimes as are detailed in the Church Report. Recently, to ward off a strong congressional oversight committee, FBI Director Clarence Kelley made a tactical apology for wrongs committed by the bureau during the "twilight" (sic) years of J. Edgar Hoover's career. But a more honest Clarence Kelley can be found in his reaction to the first revelations of the viciously unconstitutional Cointelpro program. "For the FBI to have done less under the circumstances," Kelley said, "would have been an abdication of its responsibilities to the American people."

Similarly, inside the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and other such self-sanctified transcendent cadres, the prevailing view is that the current wave of disclosures and probes merely reflects the cyclical muckraking rhythms of the beastly democratic process. The wave will recede, as

~~continued~~